

This invention relates to a compound or group of compounds present in an active principle derived from plants of species *Euphorbia peplus*, *Euphorbia hirta* and *Euphorbia drummondii*, and to pharmaceutical compositions comprising these compounds. Extracts from these plants have been found to show selective cytotoxicity against several different cancer cell lines. The compounds are useful in effective treatment of cancers, particularly malignant melanomas and squamous cell carcinomas (SCCs). In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the compound is selected from the group consisting of jatrophanes, peplanes, paralianes and ingenanes, and pharmaceutically-acceptable salts or esters thereof, and more particularly jatrophanes of Conformation II.